1: Freeman E-5 (1949-1951)1955 OC6 Iban OC6

Introduction

In September, 1948, I was appointed to undertake anthropological research in Sarawak under the auspices of the Colonial Social Science Research Council. The Secretary of the Colonial Social Science Research Council laid down as follows the nature of my research work: "a study of a traditionally based, stable, Iban community based on shifting dry rice cultivation and not subject to undue land shortage . . . . as described in 'A Report on the Possibilities of a Social Economic Survey of Sarawak,' by Dr. E. R. Leach".[1]

I arrived in Sarawak in January, 1949, and remained in the Colony until June, 1951. For most of this period I was working among the Iban of the Baleh region of the Kapit District of the Third Division. Our base camp was at Rumah Nyala in Sungai Sut, but field research was carried on in many other parts of the Baleh region—particularly in the headwaters of the Mujong. Visits were also made to Iban communities of the lower, middle and upper Rejang, the Katibas and Ngemah (in the Third Division), and of the Saribas and Ulu Batang Ai (in the Second Division). In studying agriculture many months were spent living on Iban farms, and this report is based on intensive first-hand observation; all of my investigations were carried on in the Iban language.

The Iban (or Sea Dayaks) belong to an ethnic stock which Haddon has called Proto-Malay. In brief, they are a brachycephalic people (average C. I. 83) of short stature (average height 5ft. 2½ins.), with black, lank hair and cinnamon coloured skin. Iban culture is basically proto-Malayan in type. Howell, our greatest authority on the Iban language, had no hesitation in classing it as "a dialect of the wide spreading Malay language." However, it is a dialect which has become intermixed with words borrowed from the various Borneo tribes with which the Iban have come into contact. Again, the Iban language, although it does contain a number of words that are Sanskrit in origin, has not been influenced by Arabic as have the languages of the peninsular Malays and the Menangkabau of Sumatra.

In Sarawak to-day, the Iban are the predominant element in a highly heterogeneous population. The total population of Sarawak as disclosed by the census of 1947 was 546,385, and of this number 190,326 (or 34·8%) were Iban. The past century has been for the Iban an era of expansion and they are now scattered over most of the interior zone of Sarawak—from the Samarahan river in the First Division to the Limbang river in the Fifth Division, about four hundred miles away to the north-east. However, the main concentrations of Iban population are to be found in the Second and Third Divisions.

Formerly, all of the Iban of Sarawak were shifting cultivators growing their *padi* on hillside clearings in the tropical rain-forest. To-day, there are a number of Iban communities (particularly in the lower reaches of the Lupar, Saribas and Rejang rivers) who derive their livelihood from the cultivation of wet *padi* in

[1]Leach, E. R., "Social Science Research in Sarawak," Colonial Research Studies No. 1, London, 1950.

3: Low G-5 (1844-1847) 1848
OC6 Iban OC6

Perhaps they only become manangs after having proved themselves incapable of becoming the fathers of families, but I am not inclined to believe that such is the case.

In general appearance the sea Dyaks have the advantage of the Malays and land tribes, being of a higher, though still short, stature, well made, and with limbs of excellent proportions; a subdued and calm, but resolute air; an imposing carriage, walking with a light and graceful step, and peculiarly self-possessed bearing; these qualities impress the stranger more favourably than the smaller stature, less elegant figures, darker features, and more cunning expression of the countenance of the Malays.

The dress of the sea Dyaks is very simple, the principal article of it being the chawat, a long, narrow cloth, which passing several times round the waist, and being brought between the thighs, has its broader and ornamented ends hanging before and behind to the knees. The ends hanging thus have very much the appearance of broad tails at a distance, and when these are made of the inner bark of trees, as is frequent among the land Dyaks, might easily suggest the idea of tails; and we consequently find that a race of men with these appendages inhabiting the interior is a notion very prevalent along the coast. In ordinary weather, and when about their usual occupations, the chawat above described is their only clothing, but in wet or cold days they wear a coarse jacket of cotton,

3: Low G-5 (1844 1847) 1848
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714 the white tail feathers, each having a broad black band across it, of the rhinoceros hornbill, are preferred; they have no covering or protection for their thighs or legs, but leave them as on ordinary occasions; their [411] parang, or large chopping knife, is suspended from their left sides, and another string supports on the 714 opposite side the little basket which contains their 415 sirih leaves, betel-nut, and lime, for chewing; [276] these are placed in little cases of bamboo ornamented with brass or silver, and very much carved, but after a very rude manner. A similar bamboo case, and which is generally also carried in this little [372] tambuk, or basket, contains their tinder, flint, and steel; a long knife is generally attached to it.

142 The women of these tribes are, like their husbands and brothers, short in stature, generally more stoutly made than the Malay women, and with well-developed figures; they are very much fairer than they, or even than the men of their own tribes: while young many of them would be thought very pretty, but soon, from their hard duties and other causes, they become stout and plain, and when old are frequently very ugly. When brought up amongst the Malays they continue much longer in their prime, and are generally thought 302 prettier than the women of that nation: their hair, though naturally as good, from want of care and cultivation never attains such length and profusion amongst those who reside in their own villages, though in circumstances which give them time for the adorn-

3: Low G-5 (1844-1847) 1848
OC6 Iban OC6

462 pleasing and instructive to the beholder. But while so many employments and labours fall to the lot of the women, the men, unlike those described as the inhabitants of the South Sea, and other more eastern islands of Polynesia, do not dissipate their time in debauchery or indolence, but are equally active and industrious with their weaker helpmates. The heaviest labours of the farm, the management of their trade with the Malays, building and repairing their houses and boats, making their implements of husbandry and war, employ all the time remaining from their expeditions of hunting and piracy. It is very probable 567 that, from the number of slaves in their possession, the sea-Dyaks, particularly those of the Sarebas and Sakarran tribes, do not personally labour so heavily as those of the hills; this may account for their finer appearance, which has been constantly observed by the residents at Sarawak. Not being stunted by hard [142] work, and frequent scarcity of food, their limbs more freely develope themselves than those of the poor and hitherto oppressed hill-Dyaks, who, having lost their only assistants by their children being carried into captivity, where they perform for their enemies those services which had otherwise assisted them, are compelled themselves to toil from day to day for the subsistence of such as remain, and to endeavour to procure money to purchase back the absent. The slaves of the sea-Dyaks do not in general appear to be hardly treated, as in their wars only such as

6: Freeman E-5 (1949-1951) 1958 OC6 Iban OC6

THE FAMILY SYSTEM OF THE IBAN OF BORNEO

By J. D. FREEMAN

INTRODUCTION

The Iban [1]—with whose family system this essay is concerned—are a people of western Borneo. They are to be found, for the most part, among the remote, jungle-covered ranges of the undeveloped interior zone of Sarawak, and also in certain of the inaccessible headwaters of the great Kapuas river, in what is now Kalimantan or Indonesian Borneo.

In the judgement of A. C. Haddon, the Iban are Oceanic Mongols, and they belong to an ethnic stock which he has termed Proto-Malay (Haddon and Start 1936: 1). In brief, they are a brachycephalic people (average c.i. 83), of short stature (average height of males, 5 ft. 2½ in.), with lank, black hair, cinnamon coloured skins, and typically Mongoloid features.

Iban culture is also fundamentally proto-Malayan in type. In particular, the Iban language has many close affinities with Malay, and Howell, a leading authority, classes Iban as 'a dialect of the wide spreading Malay language'. The Iban language has not, however, been influenced by Arabic; nor have Iban culture and social institutions been appreciably affected by Islam.

In Sarawak today, the Iban are the predominant element in a highly heterogeneous population. The total population of Sarawak as disclosed by the census of 1947 was 546,385, and of this number 190,326 (or 34·8 %) were Iban. Sarawak, like so many of the other countries of south-east Asia, has a plural society. Along the coast, among the deltaic swamps and in the low-lying country bordering the tidal reaches of the rivers, one finds the main centres of Malay, Chinese and Melanau settlement. Further inland, amid steep and tangled ranges drained by swift-flowing streams and rivers, live the indigenous hill peoples: the Land Dayaks, the Iban, the Kayan, the Kenyah, the Kajang and others, all of them with subsistence economies based on the shifting cultivation of dry rice.

In particular, this essay is concerned with the Ulu Ai Iban of the Baleh river of the Third Division of Sarawak. The Baleh enters the great Rejang river, from the west, at a point about 170 river miles from the sea, and along its banks and those of its numerous tributaries (the Sut, Mujong, Gat and Merirai being the most important of them), there are scattered some 133 Iban communities with a total population of about 11,500. Almost all of these

7:Gomes M-5 (ca. 1890)1911 OC6 Iban OC6

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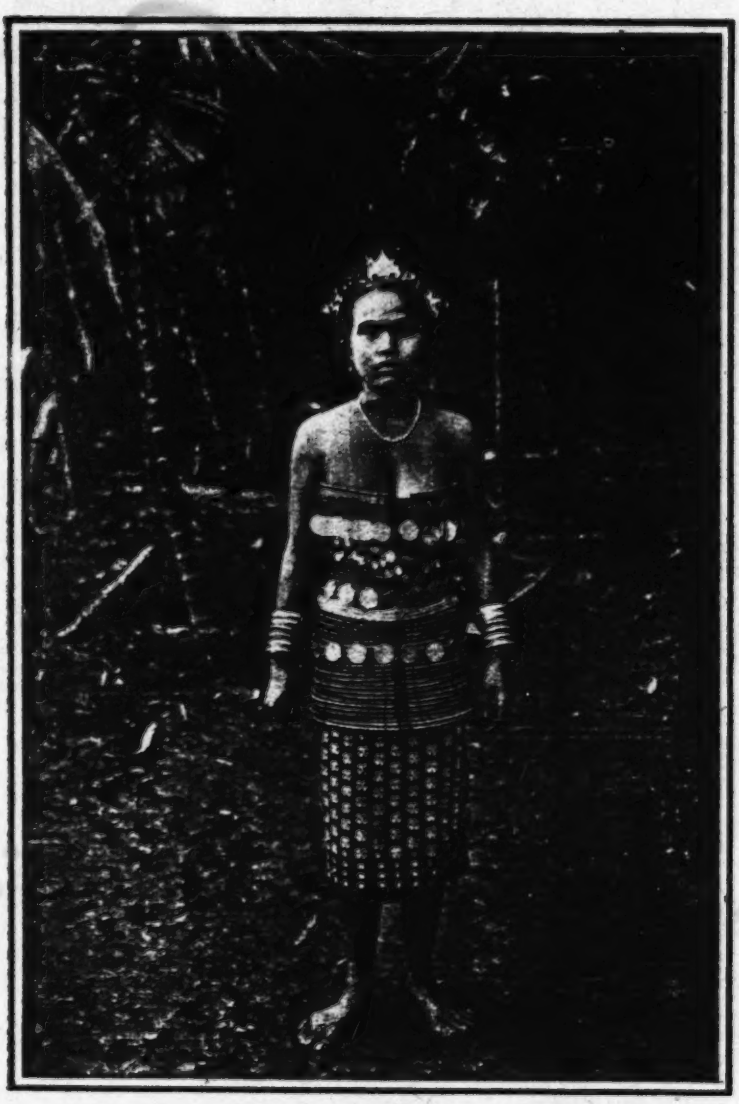

A DYAK GIRL DRESSED IN ALL HER FINERY TO ATTEND A FEAST

She has in her hair a comb decorated with silver filigree work. Round her neck is a necklace of beads. The rings round her body are made of hoops of cane, round which little brass rings are arranged close together so that none of the cane is visible. These hoops are worn next to the body above the waist, and over the petticoat below. The silver coins fastened to this brass corset, and worn as belts round it, are the silver coins of the country. The petticoat is a broad strip of cloth, sewn together at the ends and having an opening at the top and bottom. It is fastened at the waist with a piece of string.

[FACING p. iii]

7:Gomes M-5 (ca. 1890)1911 OC6 Iban OC6

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A SEA DYAK WITH SHIELD

He is dressed in the usual waist-cloth the Dyaks wear. On his head is a handkerchief decorated with a fringe. He wears a necklace of large silver buttons. On his arms are sea-shell bracelets, and on his calves a large number of palm fibre rings. His right hand is holding the handle of his sword, the sheath of which is fastened to his belt, and his left hand is on his shield. The shield is made out of one piece of wood and coloured with a fanciful design. It is decorated with human hair from the head of dead enemies.

[FACING p. 22]

7:Gomes M-5 (ca. 1890)1911 OC6 Iban OC6

used to be a little village of the Seru near my house in Kalaka, where some forty of them lived in a long house, similar to that built by the Dyaks. The men wore the Dyak dress, but the women were dressed like the Malays, and wore a long petticoat reaching to the ankles (*sarong*), and a long jacket (*kabayah*). They planted paddy, but did not depend entirely on this for their livelihood. The men were great hunters, and would salt and sell the wild pig they killed. They were a very secluded people, and kept very much to themselves. They were not Mohammedans, and did not seem to have any of the religious rites peculiar to the Dyaks. They told me they believed in a good Spirit and a bad one, but their religious ideas were very vague.

Besides the tribes already mentioned, there are two distinct races of Dyaks in Borneo—the Sea Dyaks and the Land Dyaks. The former live by the sea and on the banks of the rivers, though many of them may be found far inland. The Land Dyaks inhabit the interior of the country, and are not so numerous or energetic as the Sea Dyaks. The language and traditions of these two divisions of the Dyak race are quite distinct.

The Dyaks spoken of in this work are the Sea Dyaks. Their home is in Sarawak—the country governed by Rajah Brooke—though they often travel far afield, and they are to be found in large numbers on the banks of the rivers of Sarawak—the Batang, Lupar, Saribas, Krian, and Rejang.

The Dyak is of rather greater stature than that of the Malay, though he is considerably shorter than the average European. The men are well-proportioned, but slightly built. Their form suggests activity, speed, and endurance rather than great strength, and these are the quali-

7:Gomes M-5 (ca. 1890)1911 OC6 Iban OC6

ties most required by dwellers in the jungle. Their movements are easy and graceful, and their carriage erect. The women are generally smaller than the men. They have neat figures, and are bright, cheerful, and good-looking in their youth, but they age very soon.

The colour of their skin varies considerably, not so much between one tribe and another as in different parts of the country. Generally speaking, those who reside in the interior of the country, on the banks of the upper reaches of the rivers, are fairer than those who live nearer the sea. This may be due to the deeper shade afforded by old jungle, and the bathing in and drinking of the water of the clear, gravel-bedded streams. Their colour varies from a dark bronze to a light brown, with a tinge of yellow. Their eyes are black or dark brown, clear and bright, with quick intelligence and good temper. Their mouths are generally ill-shapen and disfigured by excessive chewing of *sirih* and betel-nut, a habit much indulged in by both men and women.

In dress great alterations have resulted from foreign influence, and the Dyaks who live near the towns wear the trousers and coat of civilized races, but the original style still prevails in the up-country villages.

Love of finery is inherent in the young Dyak. The old men are often very shabbily dressed, but the young are more particular. The ordinary male attire consists of a *sirat*, or waist-cloth, a *labong*, or headkerchief, and a *tikai buret*, or seat-mat. The waist-cloth is made of the soft inner bark of a tree, or more frequently of some red or blue cotton cloth. This is one yard wide, and from eight to eighteen feet long, and is twisted round and round their waists, and pulled up tight between the thighs, one end hanging down in front and the other behind. Sometimes

7:Gomes M-5 (ca. 1890)1911 OC6 Iban OC6

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THREE TYPICAL DYAKS

The man on the right is using a seat mat made of the skin of an animal. Sometimes these mats are made of split cane. The Dyak, in his wanderings in the jungle, has often to sit on prickly grass or sharp stones, and a seat mat is a useful part of his attire.

[FACING p. 36]

7:Gomes M-5 (ca. 1890)1911 OC6 Iban OC6

drawn tightly round the waist and reaching to the knee, and in addition a *klambi*, or jacket, worn when out of doors. For ornaments the women wear finger-rings, necklaces, earrings, and bracelets, and often a girdle formed of silver coins, or of silver or brass chain. Round the stomach are wound long strips of coloured cane. Among some tribes a peculiar corset, called the *rawai*, is worn by the women. This is made of small brass rings strung closely together on hoops of rattan, which are connected with one another inside by a network of cane. A few of these hoops are made larger so as to hang loose over the hips. The series that encase the waist, stomach, and chest fit very close. This corset must be very uncomfortable, as the wearer can hardly bend the body at all, especially when it is worn right up to and covering the breasts, as it is done by some young women who can afford such extravagance.

The hair is worn long, and tied in a knot at the back of the head. Some of the women have beautiful raven black hair of great length. Wavy or curly hair is seldom seen.

The teeth are often blackened, as black teeth are considered a sign of beauty. The blackening is done by taking a piece of old cocoanut-shell or of certain woods, and holding it over a hot fire until a black resinous juice exudes. This juice is collected, and while still warm the teeth are coated with it. The front teeth are also frequently filed to a point, and this gives their face a curious dog-like appearance. Sometimes the teeth are filed concavely in front, or else the front teeth are filed down till almost level with the gums. Another curious way of treating the front teeth is to drill a hole in the middle of each tooth, and fix in it a brass stud. I was once present when this operation was in progress. The man lay down

7:Gomes M-5 (ca. 1890)1911 OC6 Iban OC6

with a piece of soft wood between his teeth, and the "dentist" bored a hole in one of his front teeth. The agony the patient endured must have been very great, judging by the look on his face and his occasional bodily contortions. The next thing was to insert the end of a pointed brass wire, which was then filed off, leaving a short piece in the tooth; a small hammer was used to fix this in tightly, and, lastly, a little more filing was done to smooth the surface of the brass stud. I am told the process is so painful that it is not often a man can bear to have more than one or two teeth operated on at a time.

The Dyaks do not like beards, and much prefer a smooth face. In the whole course of my Dyak experience I have only met with one bearded man. The universal absence of hair upon the face, on the chest, and under the arm-pits might lead one to suppose that it was a natural deficiency. But this is not the case at all, as old men and chronic invalids, who by reason of age or infirmity have ceased to care about their personal appearance, have often chins covered with a bristly growth. The absence of hair on the face and elsewhere is due to systematic depilation. The looking-glass and tweezers are often seen in the hands of the young men, and they devote every spare moment to the plucking out of stray hairs. *Kapu*, or quicklime, which is one of the constituents of betel-nut mixture chewed by the Dyaks, is often rubbed into the skin to destroy the vitality of the hair-follicles.

Among some tribes it is the fashion for both men and women to shave the eyebrows and pull out the eyelashes, and this gives their faces a staring, vacant expression. I have often tried to convince them of the foolishness of trying to improve upon nature in this way, and pointed out that both eyebrows and eyelashes are a protection

7:Gomes M-5 (ca. 1890)1911 OC6 Iban OC6

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DYAK GIRLS POUNDING RICE

After the paddy has been passed through the husking mill it is pounded out in wooden mortars. Here are two girls at work. Each has her right foot in the upper part of the mortar to kick back any grains of paddy that may be likely to fall out.

A HUSKING MILL (*Kisar*)

After the paddy is dried and before it is pounded, it is generally passed through a husking mill made in two parts—the lower half having a stem in the middle which fits into the upper part, which is hollow. The paddy is put into a cavity in the upper half, and a man or woman seizes the handles and works the upper half to the right and left alternately. The paddy drips through on to the mat on which the husking mill is placed.

DRYING PADDY

Before it is possible to rid the paddy of its husk and convert it into rice, it has to be dried in the sun. Here a woman is seen spreading out the paddy on a mat with her hands. She is on the outside veranda of the Dyak house (*ruai/o*). The long pole over her head is used by her to drive away the fowls and birds who may come to eat the paddy put out to dry.

[FACING p. 46]

7:Gomes M-5 (ca. 1890)1911 OC6 Iban OC6

[facing p. 102]

DYAK CHILDREN

The figure on the right is a boy, the other five are girls. The children are fond of games, and are generally expert swimmers, but they have to make themselves useful, and help their parents very early in life. Dyak parents are very kind to their children, who, as a rule, return the affection, and do as they are told from a desire to please them.

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7:Gomes M-5 (ca. 1890)1911 OC6 Iban OC6

[Facing p. 114]

A DYAK YOUTH

He has on an elaborate headkerchief decorated with tassels and small pieces of silver or brass. These headkerchiefs are sometimes woven by the Dyaks themselves, or else they make the border of bright-coloured threads and sew it round a piece of red or blue imported cloth.

A DYAK LAD

On his head he has a headkerchief which consists of a square piece of cloth tied in such a manner as to form a cap.

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7:Gomes M-5 (ca. 1890)1911 OC6 Iban OC6

[facing p. 222]

COCK FIGHTING

Sometimes at feasts cock fighting takes place in the veranda of the Dyak house. At other times it takes place on the ground outside. Here two Dyaks are matching their cocks against each other, while a crowd of men and boys stand around.

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7:Gomes M-5 (ca. 1890)1911 OC6 Iban OC6

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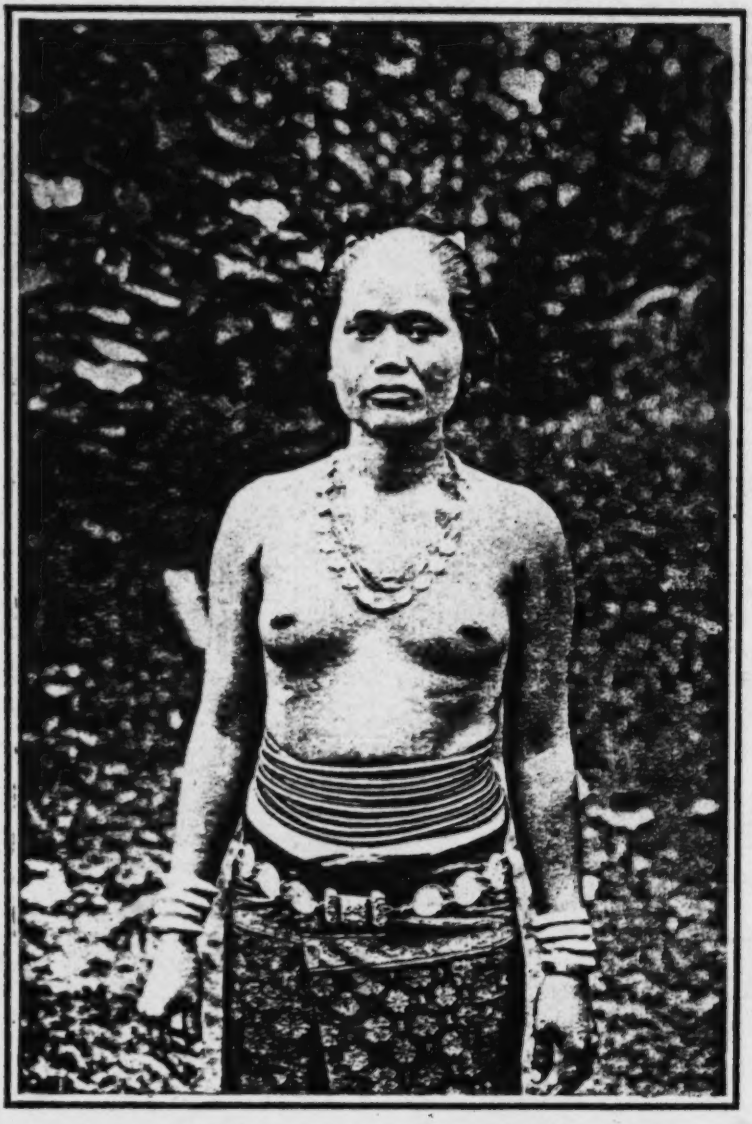

A Dyak Woman in Everyday Costume

She is wearing a necklace of small silver current coins, fastened together with silver links. The bangles are hollow, and of silver or brass, made separately, but worn several together on each wrist. The two favourite colours for petticoats are blue and red. The red petticoat, as in the picture, has often a design in white worked or woven into it.

[FACING p.268]

7:Gomes M-5 (ca. 1890)1911 OC6 Iban OC6

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A DYAK IN GALA COSTUME

He has a fringed headkerchief, in which are fixed feathers of the rhinoceros hornbill, and other birds. His ears are decorated with lead pendants. Round his neck are necklaces of beads, and brass or silver buttons. He has shell bracelets and brass and cane rings on his arms, and a large number of palm fibre rings on his wrists. Round his waist is a belt of silver coins, and his sword is fastened to his side. He is wearing the Dyak waistcloth and has a *sarong* on his right shoulder. This is the usual dress worn by a Dyak at a feast.

[FACING p. 326]

11:Freeman E-5 (1949-1951)1957 OC6 Iban OC6

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(1) The gathering of the clay (Iban pot-making).

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(2) Clay being laid out in the sun. (Iban pot-making).

[p. 156a]

17:Bedford D-5 (1958) 1959 OC6 Iban OC6

other even approached it. The other diets gave a very low daily fat intake. 146

Fat is required to enhance the calorie value of a diet without unduly increasing its bulk.

The daily carbohydrate intake exceeded in every case the average daily British intake of carbohydrate by amounts ranging from 80 grammes to 166 grammes. This probably represents an attempt to acquire calories which ought to be acquired in the form of fat. Anyone who has visited longhouses and watched the Sea Dayak at table must have marvelled at the huge platefuls of rice which are consumed in the process of assimilating this large quantity of carbohydrate.

To attain a calorie intake of 3,000 calories the food consumed must have a caloric value of 3,300 calories—as 10 per cent of the calories are lost in the process of digestion.

Only one diet at Rumah Bujak attained this level. Again taking into account the crude nature of the analysis of the diets and a daily calorie intake of less than 2,800 calories being considered unsatisfactory on British standards, then 11 (44 per cent) of the diets would be in this category.

The people of Rumah Bujak are on the whole shorter and lighter than the average British subject so that part of the deficit could be accounted for by a lower basal energy requirement, say 400 calories less as a generous estimate. This, however, leaves a further deficit in the 11 diets which is probably real and undesirable. The cause of this suboptimal calorie intake is probably the low fat content of the diet. The attempt to acquire calories in the form of carbohydrate is limited by the bulk of the food and is not completely successful. It is interesting that the only diet which exceeded the average daily British calorie intake also slightly exceeded the average daily British fat intake (Door 5, Table IV). [142]

A normal woman and a growing child require 15 mgs. of iron daily. Men require about a third this amount (Whiby and Britton, 1957). It is therefore evident that the average daily iron intake provided by all the diets in the present study is